TO: Assessment Committee

FROM: Director, Emily Nolan – Gerstacker Institute

RE: Year End Assessment Report

DATE: May 25, 2012

Given the recent curricular changes in Gerstacker, we have a new major – Business & Organizations. In essence, our assessment efforts will be starting from scratch as we seek to assess the effectiveness of the new major including curriculum, experiential, and professional components. This report includes: (1) A description of the assessment steps completed/that informed the development of the new major, (2) Alumni and current student climate survey feedback, and (3) Action steps for the 2012-2013 academic year in terms of assessment.

***Point 1 - Gerstacker Proposal: Business & Organizations Major Assessment Plan***

***STEP 1***: Critical Competencies/Learning Goals Required for Recent Business Graduates

The Gerstacker Advisory Committee discussed the critical competencies needed by a recent graduate from a business program. See below:

* Business Communication (to include written and presentation skills)
* Intercultural/Global Understanding and Awareness
* Economics
* Accounting
* Leadership/Management
* Quantitative Reasoning
* Ethics
* Internships (Critical thought to Action)

***STEP 2***: Once the competencies were identified, we then discussed the critical skills and abilities all recent graduates must possess (and situated those skills in a liberal arts environment). See below:

* Analytical Thinking
* Multiple Framing (helps students view situations from multiple perspectives and identify best possible, rather than “right” solutions)
* Reflective Exploration of Meaning (enables students to grasp alternative ways of thinking)
* Practical Reasoning (helps students develop and communicate clear, concise, and articulate arguments)
* Senior Capstone Experience (Critical Thought to Action)

***STEP 3***: Create learning goal guides on a per competency (e.g., course) basis.

Learning goal guides were created for each of the above noted competencies in Step 1. These were created by area experts (e.g., Perry Myers and Vicki Baker who both teach internationally/interculturally focused courses discussed the key goals and experiences that must be included in a course in order for that course to be deemed acceptable/meet the Intercultural/Global Issues goals). These learning goals support competency based assessment and serve as a guide for the Internal Advisory Committee when reviewing courses for inclusion (or deletion) moving forward.

***STEP 4***: Link skills and abilities to specific courses proposed in the revised Business & Organizations Major. See below:

* Analytical Thinking: Economics Pre-requisites, Financial Accounting, Intermediate Economics Cognate, Statistics Cognate, Business Functions
* Multiple Framing: Management / Psychology Hybrid, Ethics, International / Global Issues
* Reflective Exploration of Meaning: Ethics, Professional Communication, International / Global Issues, First-year workshop (Leadership in the Humanities, Leading and Being Led)
* Practical Reasoning: First-year workshop (Writing for Purpose), Professional Communication, Professional Writing,
* Senior Capstone Experience:

***Point 2 – Assessment Results from Alumni and Current Student Climate Survey***

*Alumni Survey*

In Spring 2012, over 300 Gerstacker alumni were emailed and asked to take a brief 3-question survey about the courses they took while in Gerstacker. The questions asked them to rate the usefulness of the Gerstacker curriculum in regards to career preparation. The results of the survey stated the Gerstacker courses most useful / relevant for career preparation were: Financial Accounting (78%), Business Ethics (55%) and Professional Communications (52%). The top three courses our alumni found least beneficial in preparing them for their careers were: Calculus (62%), Econ Stats (235) (32%) and Intermediate Microeconomics (30%). We also asked for additional feedback for what they would recommend being added to benefit future Gerstacker students in their business careers, and courses on Professional Speaking / Communications (71%), EXCEL skills (68%) with Marketing, Professional Writing and Global / International Culture (all 53%) were the top choices.

These results reinforced the Gerstacker Advisory Board member’s assessment and recommendations for the new direction for the Gerstacker Curriculum. Additional comments to better the overall program included: adding an overview of Information Technology Management, basic corporate finance course, and a class in business etiquette / personal growth and development – which would include goal setting and achievement. As the curriculum continues to evolve with the development of the First-Year workshops and senior capstone projects, these comments can help guide that course development.

*Current Student Climate Survey*

Given all the changes surrounding the Gerstacker Program, we administered a current student climate survey. Key areas addressed on the survey included: Demographics (e.g., major/minor, business area of interest, etc), satisfaction with current curriculum (e.g., Gerstacker courses, courses missing from the curriculum), professional development opportunities (e.g. mock interviews, speakers, mentoring program), experiential opportunities (internships, off campus, etc), and satisfaction with the administrative staff.

Similar to the Alumni Survey feedback, the students also noted some weaknesses in the current curriculum that supported the changes made in the Gerstacker Program. It is clear based on students’ responses that they are looking for more interdisciplinary and opportunities outside of economics and accounting (if not pursuing those fields). Students also requested more management, finance, and marketing courses (in that order of preference). Therefore, these assessment results confirm our decision to move in the approved curricular direction with Gerstacker.

In terms of professional development opportunities, students find the mock interviews to be most beneficial. In fact, student feedback suggested that introducing these as early as first year would be helpful. Students also would like more networking opportunities. While students found value in the speakers, they found the format to be boring and lacking engagement at times. Students also do not like the mandatory attendance. They found great value in recruitment events (M&M Night) and would like to see more variety and perhaps recruitment events in both fall and spring. It was clear that not all students were aware of the Gerstacker Mentoring program based on survey feedback. For those that did participate, some found it lacking structure, resulting in less satisfaction. Students also really liked the etiquette dinner and found this to be one of the most helpful activities Gerstacker hosts.

In terms of experiential opportunities and support, the internship program continues to be one of, if not the, strongest component of the Gerstacker program which is still a central component under the new model. Some students disagree with having to take the internship for academic credit, but overall, they found the support provided by the GI staff (and Career Development) to be most helpful.

Lastly, we asked students to provide feedback on the Administrative Staff of Gerstacker. As expected, students’ commented about the high turnover and lack of continuity and consistency at the Director Position. With the arrival of Emily Nolan, we believe we have stabilized this issue. Anne Cox, Program Coordinator, has been in that role for a year which has also brought stability to the Institute. Students did note that they would like to see the Director more engaged with the students/student life in the Institute. Students suggested that the GI Administrative staff (Director, Program Coordinator) attend more GI social events, activities of the students, etc. to create the family atmosphere that they feel is lacking. Students did note, however, that since Emily’s arrival, expectations are more clearly communicated, schedules are set, and the office is more organized which students appreciate.

Gerstacker continues to build on its strengths: summer school and internships. We also look for continuous improvement with speakers (choosing topics of interest and providing engaging activities for them). Additionally, the search for a permanent Associate Director is underway and we hope to have that finalized by the end of June. The addition of the Associate Director will further stabilize the staff in the office and it should help students feel more confident in the direction of the Gerstacker program. Finally, the Director is looking for opportunities to have greater engagement with the Gerstacker students. This is the first director in a long time that has not had classroom responsibilities, so Gerstacker students have fewer opportunities to engage with her and form a stronger relationship. Therefore, in the spirit of continuous improvement, additional opportunities for interaction are being developed.

***Point 3 – Assessment Plan for the 2012-2013 Academic Year***

For the upcoming academic year, we are going to develop and launch Gerstacker’s First-year workshop for Gerstacker students. The 5-day workshop will explore topics such as: Teambuilding, PowerPoint / Excel Skills Building, Leadership in the Humanities, Leading and Being Led, and Writing for Purpose. These courses will help develop teamwork, critical thought and teach a practical skills set for business students. The workshop will be held in January and assessed in the Spring of 2013.

*Courses under consideration for First Year Workshop for Gerstackers:*



The goal of these first year workshops is to allow students to embrace learning and engage in discussions with their peers while exploring topics ranging from leadership to focused writing. These course topics were selected based on feedback from recruiters, professional business leaders and our Gerstacker Advisory Committee. The workshop will introduce students to critical thinking exercises (when answers aren’t always black and white) as well as leadership activities where they can practice leadership and also learn what it takes to be a good follower. It provides an exciting way for Gerstacker first-years to explore new ways of thinking and challenge them to also build new skills. Some courses will enhance their writing along with teaching some basic computer programs that are necessary to succeed in the college environment and the wider world. The teambuilding events will allow students to build a community with their peers, faculty and staff. Finally, the leadership courses are meant to strengthen their critical academic reasoning skills. It is a great opportunity for our Gerstackers to foster their intellectual and personal growth.

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